FAQ for RFA-LM-06-001
Institutional Grants for Research Training in Biomedical Informatics

1. What fields of informatics are suitable for training support from NLM?

- NLM's main focus is on informatics with relevance to biomedicine. Applications that focus on informatics for a specific disease entity, or on biological or biochemical science with remote relation to health are discouraged. If in doubt, contact NLM before submitting.

2. Should trainee research projects be described in Table 10 or in the narrative?

- Applicants should describe research projects in the narrative but also concisely list "research topic" in Table 10.

3. How should trainee publications be listed?

- As noted in the RFA, include only publications and presentations that are peer-reviewed and published or in press by March 17, 2006. Do not include publications that resulted from trainees' work prior to their entering the program. It is not necessary to list trainee publications in the progress report narrative. Rather, list them in an extension of Table 10, such that each publication appears only once even though it might be co-authored with other trainees.

4. Should M.D.s and others with non-computer doctorates who are enrolled for a Master's degree also take the core curriculum?

- Yes. The core curriculum applies to everyone in the proposed NLM-supported program.

5. Should trainee accomplishments (Table 10) include work by trainees in the program but who are not supported by NLM?

- No. Include only NLM trainees in Table 10, but non-NLM trainees of program faculty can be listed in Table 4

6. Should estimated tuition costs be based on tuition levels expected for 2007?

- Yes, but they should not be escalated beyond that level in the out-year budgets

7. For consortia, how should the additional allowed pages (3 pages for each "additional" site) be used?

- The extra space is provided with the intent of enabling programs to describe the goals and resources of each consortium member site. Applicants are encouraged to contact NLM program staff with their specific questions.

8. For reviewers and NLM, does the language about Principal Domain imply some preference for single domain programs?

- NLM is neither encouraging nor discouraging specialization. The number of domains covered in an application is not a review or funding criterion.

9. Will funding be based on merit review only, or will NLM also consider the need for optimal representation of each of the principal domains in the set of programs to be funded?

- Review scores will have great importance as always, but NLM's interest in having adequate representation nationally of each of the principal domains will also be a factor in funding decisions.

10. For existing programs, can the progress report in the renewal application satisfy the NLM requirement for an annual progress report?

- This question is still under consideration. PIs of the 18 currently-funded programs will receive a separate communication from NLM about this.

11. Must the core curriculum be exactly the same for all trainees? For example, would a physician registered for a Master's degree have to take the same statistics course that would be necessary for a pre-doc in computational biology?

- We understand that coverage of some subtopics within the "methods" side of the curriculum can be tailored to fit the trainees' intended area of application, but the concept of core curriculum requires that the preponderance of core experiences should be suitable for all trainees.

12. Is NLM requesting percent effort information for each faculty member for any purpose, including possible salary support from the allotments provided per student?

- We do not require percent effort estimates for program faculty. Salary support is one of many appropriate uses of training related expenses.

13. Should the application domain(s) covered by the program be included in the program title?

- Domains of interest must be delineated in the narrative, but need not necessarily be included in the program title.

14. For a single-site program that utilizes other institutions for rotations and course work, should stipends and other costs be based in part on those of the partner institution or wholly on the "home" institution?

- Stipends for trainees are fixed, and do not depend on institution. If trainees are to take courses at multiple institutions, tuition estimates should be as accurate as possible to reflect any differing tuition rates among those institutions. The bases of these estimates should be explained in the budget justification.

15. Can you elaborate on the definition of "site" within a consortial program?

- The currently-funded consortial grant to Rice University illustrates the consortial principle well. This program with six sites is organized through the Gulf Coast Consortium. There is some interchange among the sites and their trainees, but each site in the consortium recruits and selects its own trainees.

16. We currently have NLM-supported trainees who are based in another department, such as computer science, for purposes of obtaining the Ph.D. Is this custom permitted by the RFA?

- Yes, a joint degree or a degree in another field is acceptable as long as the students have had the core training and experience required by the RFA. Also, the faculty and other program features depicted in Tables 1-8 should reflect the training that is proposed for 2007 and beyond, not how the program might have been organized prior to that time.

17. In the RFA's definition of consortia, how would we classify an entity that participates in joint recruitment with others, but still appoints its own trainees?

- Even if recruiting is done by the consortium as a whole, if an entity appoints its own trainees, it would be considered to be a distinct site if included as part of a consortium.

18. Should clinicians who are not technically-oriented take the computer science component of the core?

- How much computer science is in the core curriculum is for the PI to decide, and the depth of that training can vary somewhat depending on intended career path. However, to the extent that computer science is in the core curriculum, every trainee must have that exposure to computer science.

19. How does the requirement that a program be fully approved by the institution apply to fully-approved programs for which requests for alterations or new program tracks are pending?

- If a program has been approved in the sense that it is formally authorized by the university to grant academic degrees, NLM considers it acceptable whether or not further changes in the program may be pending. Not acceptable is a degree program that has not yet ever been formally approved by the institution. Degree programs that are in the process of being considered for approval are also not acceptable. The program must be approved at the highest-level of institutional authority (usually the Board of Regents or Directors, or equivalent) by March 17, 2006.

20. Can the final degree for predoctoral trainees come from biological fields as well as from computational fields?

- Yes, if the training program elements for core and elective course work, as well as research experience, conform to the requirements of the RFA for training in "informatics", the name of the degree is not constrained.

21. Are there limits on acceptable consortial arrangements?

- NLM welcomes applications from consortia, but strongly advises applicants who are planning novel arrangements to contact NLM in advance.

22. Should tables be grouped in a separate section or may they be interspersed at appropriate places in the narrative?

- Either is acceptable, but placement should be clear and logical

23. Can an institution applying for a single-site program also be a participating site in a separate consortial application?

- In general, no. It might be possible if there were no overlap whatsoever between the training scopes of the two programs; but such an exception would require specific prior approval by NLM program staff.

For questions about these and other items, contact:

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